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ABSTRACT

Research, statewide evaluation, and student followup studies have indicated that students in adult basic education and English as a second language classes learn more when they are in classrooms in which the teachers practice the following participatory learning principles: establish a learning-centered classroom, personalize instruction, relate learning activities to each learner's experiences, assess students' needs, build a friendly and informal climate, participate in the learning process, and encourage flexibility for personal growth and development. (MN)

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FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

IMPLEMENTING ADULT LEARNING PRINCIPLES

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How to Use This Worksheet

The following list of seven learning principles and the brief description of adult behaviors that are related to these principles should suggest to you several kinds of possible teacher actions to implement these principles in the adult education classroom. Snap this insert out of the journal, and make several copies. Fill in the blank column on the right with your ideas. Share blank forms with your colleagues. Ask them to fill in the blank column. *Then discuss your answers.* Be ready for a lively discussion! This worksheet has been used in a variety of staff development training sessions. It has always sparked a spirited discussion which produced divergent ideas and practical strategies for improving instruction. Good luck.

Adult Learning Principles

Adult education is a distinct field and has its own body of theory. This theory base contains a number of learning principles that focus on increasing the learner's participation in the educational activity and the learner's responsibility for the learning. Research, statewide evaluations, and student follow-up studies have indicated that students in adult basic education classes and English as a second language classes learn more when they are in a classroom in which the teacher practices the following participatory learning principles.

Establishing a learner-centered classroom. This is accomplished by allowing the students to initiate actions and to take

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IMPLEMENTING ADULT LEARNING PRINCIPLES		
Learning Principle	**Adult Behavior**	**Possible Teacher Action**
1. Learner-centered	Wants the learner, not the teacher, to be the focus of learning activities	
2. Personalizing instruction	Seeks variety to meet own needs	
3. Relating to experience	Has numerous and rich experiences in life	
4. Assessing student needs	Desires identification and justification of own learning needs	
5. Climate building	Wants security to interact and experiment	
6. Participation in learning process	Seeks self-direction in curriculum decisions	
7. Flexibility for personal development	Moves toward being a fully functioning person	

responsibility for their own learning. Students are encouraged to develop their own ideas and values, are involved in setting their educational goals, and are evaluated informally. Since many individual differences exist, a variety of teaching methods and materials are used by the teacher who functions as a facilitator rather than as a reservoir of knowledge.

Personalizing instruction. To meet the unique needs of each student, educational objectives are based on individual motives and abilities. Various materials and methods are used, and instruction is often self-paced. The teacher engages in much informal counseling and encourages cooperation rather than competition among the students.

Relating learning activities to each learner's experiences. To make learning relevant, activities are organized to take into account the student's prior life experiences and to take into consideration the problems that the students encounter in everyday living. Students are encouraged to ask basic questions about the nature of their society and about their role in it.

Assessing student needs. Treating a student as an adult means finding out what each student wants and needs to know. This information can be gathered by individual conferences and informal counseling.

Building a friendly and informal climate. A warm and supportive classroom environment can be created by encouraging student dialogue and interaction. Errors are accepted as a natural part of the learning process with failure serving as feedback for future positive actions. Students have the freedom to explore elements related to their self-concept, to practice problem-solving skills, and to develop interpersonal skills.

Participating in the learning process. Students can be involved in determining the nature of the content material for their own learning and in deciding the exact criteria that will be used to judge if adequate learning has occurred. Involvement in identifying the problems to be studied and in the evaluation process fosters an adult-to-adult relationship between the teacher and student in which both are active participants.

Encouraging flexibility for personal growth and development. Because personal fulfillment is a central aim of education, flexibility is maintained by adjusting the classroom environment and curricular content to meet the changing needs of the students. Issues that relate to value judgements are addressed in free, open discussions to stimulate understanding and future personal growth.